

# THE GENIAL IDIOT. HE DOES A LITTLE PREACHING

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

"HERE are the days," quoth the Idiot, as Mr. Whitechoker, the clergyman, left the breakfast room, "that I envy that man his opportunity. During the Lenten period and in the ordinarily dull seasons of the year the labor of the clergy is not for mine, but in the autumn when there is so much doing of one kind and another that is of vital interest to mankind there's nothing I'd like better than the chance to stand up in a pulpit with a congregation at my mercy and hammer 'em hard with good advice."

"It's a pity you can't invent some kind of a new religion that will permit you to be a clergyman in the fall and a stock broker the rest of the year," answered the Bibliomaniac. "Why don't you put that inventive mind of yours upon the proposition? I'll promise to pay you \$100,000 for the first sermon you give as a sort of nucleus for your following."

"Thank you, kindly," said the Idiot, "but I really couldn't. With you, my field of endeavor my work would be doomed to failure at the very beginning. You can reform almost any kind of a heathen, but a Bibliomaniac whose habits have struck in and become as the very warp and woof of his moral physical and intellectual texture is beyond hope of redemption. But I would like to go out and preach this morning to Mr. Whitechoker's congregation, just as I would like to have preached to them at the Thanksgiving service on Thursday."

"I guess you are not the only knacker that feels that way," said the Doctor. "That's where you trip, Doctor," retorted the Idiot. "There are enough knackers to be met with every day on the streets and in public places without going to church for them. It's the knacker in the pulpit that I'd like to supersede. I read six Thanksgiving sermons last Friday morning, and I listened to one on Thursday morning, and every one of 'em was a jeremiad. You'd have thought old Jeremiah himself had been manifested and sent back to earth to fill all the glad places there-of with lamentation. I'm sure of it, the sermon I read warned the republic that it was going to pot, and the fifth openly asserted that it had arrived at pot already. People in low places were corrupt. People in low places were vulgar, selfish and of rotten heart, filled with envy, hatred and malice, indolent of mind, lazy of soul, inert of body. High society was immoral to the core. There was no longer such a thing as family life. Fidelity, honor, and trust were terms of archaic significance—in short, this old ball of ours, these preaching gentlemen, were averring, was rolling along to perdition and exceeding the speed limit at that."

"Well, by Jimminy, they come pretty close to it," cried the Bibliomaniac.

"Tush!" ejaculated the Idiot. "Let tush express your sentiments just as much expresses yours. If I were the Recording Angel I'd sue all you people who talk that way about the world for libel, and if I could grab hold of a pulpit somewhere for just one little ten minutes this morning I'd lambaste the clerical knackers for misrepresenting things so hard that the people in the front pews would put their automobile goggles on to protect their eyes from the splinters that would fly. Honestly it makes me mad clear through when a man who has grown from infancy to mature years getting three square meals a day, his clothes, his bed, his board and lodging, his physical and spiritual nourishment out of this little old ball we live on, turns upon it and denounces it in public as a sink of iniquity, and picks out his own country that has safeguarded his person and given him his opportunity for the most arduous shades of his inactivity, or at least of his irony."

"You think the world is perfect, then?" demanded the Doctor.

"Yes, I do," said the Idiot. "Even if it isn't what have you to offer that is any better? What divine conception of man's great brain is it that will work as well? There are toads and snakes, and vile reptiles of one kind and another in it, of course, but why dwell on toads when the forests are filled with birds of beautiful plumage and lovely voices with which they carol forth the sweetest of songs in glad welcome to the rising sun every morning of their lives out of the sheer swelling of the great happiness in their hearts and souls? Why doesn't your knacker look upon the beautiful effluence of the water lily and expatiate upon the loveliness of its form, the delicacy of its tints, and the sweetness of its perfume instead of ranting about the fact that its roots are embedded in the mud and slime of the river bed? That's what I can't understand about these knackers. Why judge the world by the evil things in it and hang it for a tangle of woe and dishonor when there is such a preponderance of beautiful things in it over the ugly?"

"That's an assumption that is at least disputable," said Mr. Brief. "You might name a few of those alleged preponderances."

"I'd like nothing better: at \$10 a dozen," laughed the Idiot. "To begin with there are more free people than fall-birds in the world today. There are more schools than penitentiaries. There are more men and women living in happy wedlock than there are plain and defendants in the divorce courts. There are more drops of water in the ocean than tears in the eyes of the afflicted. There are more men, women and children who can read and hear and talk than there are deaf, dumb and blind. There are more beautiful scenes in nature than there are painters to paint them. The treasures of the earth are inexhaustible. There is more food than hunger."

"There I dispute you!" interrupted the Bibliomaniac.

"Although the means of distribution have not yet been so perfected that everybody can always count upon getting his share," continued the Idiot. "On the whole, however, considering the population of the earth, the service we have is good. If some people have to wait overlong for their dinners it is unfortunate, and they deserve our pity, and in so far as we can we should give them of our own supply, but we must not accuse Mother Earth of brooding famine because of it. If something goes wrong it's not the world's fault, and it may not always be the victim's fault, but in most cases it is the fault in human breasts there are more hearts than stones. There are more mothers than old maids."

"Yes, and there's war, and there's murder, and there's railway accidents, and there's disease," cried the Bibliomaniac.

"True—and how many nations are there now at war?" demanded the Idiot. "Russia and Japan. Two out of fifty independent nations. Including dear little baby Panama, are engaged in a scrap while the remainder are living in amity together. Therefore there is more peace than war in the world. As for murder, the world is growing better all the time. In Adam and Eve's time Cain was quite a tenth of the known population of the world. Today in a nation of nearly 100,000,000 persons there aren't more than 500 murderers awaiting trial, or one-two hundred thousandth of the whole. A man doesn't need to be a lightning calculator or an Edward Atkinson on statistics to figure out the percentage of improvement in that line. Then there are, as you say, railway accidents and auto-

mobile accidents and disasters on the sea, but more people die in their beds than in all of these combined. Why don't you begin a crusade against beds? Point out how in millions of cases people have died in the end found in the habit of going to bed a fatal ending. You knackers are not consistent, my dear Mr. Brief. You are always whacking somebody else for his shortcomings and never considering your own."

"Dying in bed is not the result of carelessness," retorted the Doctor.

"That's special pleading, Doctor," laughed the Idiot. "I'm not so sure that if the records could be made public it could be conclusively shown that dying in bed is the result of a carefully conceived plan on the part either of the patient or of the family physician."

"Well, anyhow," interposed Mr. Brief, "if you went out this morning to preach what would you say? I believe that was the starting point of this ill-fated discourse upon water lilies, railway accidents and Edward Atkinson. Would you tell your congregation that they were the people and that the millennium had arrived?"

"Not I," quoth the Idiot. "I'd tell 'em when they looked upon a beautiful book to consider it as a thing of beauty and not about speculating as to whether the printer's devil in the composing room in which the types were set were an ink-stained suit of overalls and had dirty hands, or a dimly bibbed soldier of the world. I'd ask them when they sat down to a superbly

cooked dinner to judge the dinner from the point of view of a finished thing and not insist upon being shown the kitchen and the coal bins and other places below stairs where this delectable thing was prepared for their consumption. I'd preach the beauty of achievement, not the 'homeliness' of preparation or ugliness of failure. If I found a lot of people filled with misery I'd preach hope, not more misery. If I found them full of hope, I'd still pile it on, for hope is a thing we can't have too much of. Give a man \$10,000, and no hope and he's a pauper in happiness. Give a chap \$10 and as much hope as he can stand and he's a potential millionaire. And when I came to the point of my discourse wherein I discussed the world—gee! but wouldn't I pile it on. Is there anything rounder, is there anything richer, is there anything sweeter, is there anything that is fuller of opportunity than this abused little world? Do we know of any air that furnishes better breathing than the air we consume? Is there any better buckwheat on Mars, Jupiter, Saturn or the Great Dipper than that which little old Mother Earth, aided and abetted by Mrs. Pedagogy, coins into cakes for us favored sons of fortune? Have they any better republics than our own on any earth that we know of? As for society, granted that the morals of Mr. and Mrs. Jimmie's Bonds, lately divorced, are such as to disgrace themselves, do they necessarily disgrace all society in which dwell happily the

Newly-weds, the Grandpères and all the other decent families who by their fine living and kindly hearts and simple dignity have won the positions they occupy in the public eye? The defaulting Sunday school superintendent does not make the Sunday school a school of crime. One embezzler of public funds does not make all public officials corrupt, and out of the muck and mire of American politics there has never yet risen a president of the United States who has disgraced his office, and shares the line along which I should like to preach. Judged by results, the world and all mankind have shown themselves to be pretty good stuff. Both, according to the Jeremiahs, have been going to the devil from the beginning of time, and are still just as far from their journey's end as they ever were."

At this point there was some commotion at the other end of the table.

"Gracious me!" cried the Genial Old Gentleman who Occasionally Intubates, giving a yawn and indulging in a good stretch. "I really believe I have been asleep."

"You have—and snored, too," said the Poet. "The—Idiot has been preaching."

"I seem to have qualified," said the Idiot unaltered. "There is nothing more indicative of a hopeful spirit than the ability to sleep soundly under unusual conditions."

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## THE AMERICAN ELK

BY ERNEST HAROLD BAYNES.

THINK of a deer as tall as a sixteen-hand horse, with head, neck and chest of a rich dark brown, body a light yellowish brown, with a yellowish-white area on the rump about the base of the tail, and crowned with a pair of massive brown antlers, perhaps sixty inches long and with six sharp points apiece, and you will have a fair mental picture of a full-grown male elk, as he appears in the fall and winter. The female, or doe, has much the same appearance, except that she has no antlers at any season of the year.

To my mind, the elk is the most kingily of deer, not excepting the moose, which is larger and heavier.

Years ago, the elk was found in all the northern states and in Canada, and along the mountain ranges, much further to the south. But, owing to the advance of civilization and many less noble causes, this splendid animal has disappeared from many parts of its former range, and is practically extinct east of the Mississippi river. It is abundant in but one locality—the Yellowstone national park, and the country immediately surrounding it. It is altogether probable that within a few years it will disappear from all other parts of the country, unless it is quickly protected by much better laws than are now in force.

Many elk are butchered for their meat, but the craze for mounted heads, and the barbarous demand for elk teeth, to be worn as insignia by members of the order of Elks, are responsible for the slaughter of many of these great creatures every year.

At my home near the Blue Mountain forest game preserve we hear every night a sweet-toned, long drawn whistle or bugle note, which is the challenge call of the male elk, which he delivers through his open mouth, and with his head thrown back. Sometimes the call is answered by a rival stag, and the two will come together and fight for mastery and for the ownership of a herd. Sometimes I steal out into the forest and watch a band of these great creatures in the dusk or in the moonlight, and perhaps I come upon them feeding on the fallen apples in some ancient orchard. From time to time the stag will throw back his head, and the long-drawn whistle will go echoing through the hills, and at the end there is often a series of braying notes which are much less pleasing, and which suggest those of a donkey. Sometimes, when there are no apples on the ground, the male will thrust his long antlers up among the branches and shake a lot down, and I believe that he does this intentionally. But as often as not, the elk will be aware of my presence before I can get a glimpse of them, and I find every head turned straight towards me, their great ears stuck out on either side, drinking in every sound I make. They seem inquisitive, and if I keep perfectly still they will stand for some time gazing at me as statues. By and by one of the does will become uneasy and take a few strides before turning to watch me again. Then, after looking in silence for another minute, she delivers a loud, somewhat shrill bark, which might be fairly represented in English by the word "Waugh!" This call usually has a tone of suspicion in it, it is a warning, not only to other elk, but to deer, foxes and many other forest creatures, which usually make for cover at once. Sometimes it is repeated, either the same elk or by another one, and as a rule the whole band makes off at a good pace, the stag bringing up the rear, and often turning half round, as though warning his enemies not to hurry him. And unless fully armed, it is well to take the hint, for a savage "bull" elk is about as dangerous a brute as ever killed a man for the joy of killing him. I have been told by experienced hunters that on an open plain and unwarped they would sooner face a wounded tiger than a savage elk. The insane nature of an elk's fury, they say, would preclude all possibility of escape. If there are trees about, a man stands a good chance; that is, if he knows anything of the ways of elk. A savage stag gives little warning of his murderous intentions. If he sees his intended victim at a distance, he does not rush at him wildly, like a mad bull, but slowly saunters over, stopping now and then to nibble the grass, perhaps, acting as though he had never even seen the man, but gradually lessening the distance between them. When fairly close, he raises his head, lays back his ears and lips, and, with an ugly grimace, strides slowly, but steadily, forward, shaking his antlers as though in play. If there are trees near, the man had best lose no time in getting into it, for the elk may come the last few yards like a whirlwind and stab him to death with almost inconceivable fury. Of course, all male elk are not savage, and those which are are dangerous only in the fall and winter. After dropping their horns, as they do usually in March, their disposition becomes comparatively mild, and remains so until the following autumn. In April the new horns begin to appear, looking at first like two big brown tomatoes, which gradually lengthen and branch out, reaching their full length in June. But even then they look very little like the dangerous weapons of October, for they are blunt, soft and would bleed freely if injured. Moreover, they are covered all over with a hairy skin, and are said to be "in the velvet." At this time of the year, the animals look in bad condition, as they are shedding their winter coats. Gradually the antlers begin to shrink, becoming sharp at the tips and hard all over, and in August the "velvet" is rubbed off against convenient trees. By October 1 the animals have acquired their new winter

coats, the antlers are new and sharp and the stags are apt to be dangerous again.

Young elk are born in April and May, and at first their skins are beautifully spotted. In about three months the spots have disappeared, never to reappear. It seems likely that the spots serve to deceive their enemies at a season when they are young and helpless, by causing them to resemble patches of white flowers, such as are seen blooming everywhere in the spring.

Man Who Went Shopping.

(New York Press.)

"I wouldn't take a man shopping with me unless what I saw the other day for the price of all my automobile repairs was a whole year," declared a Brooklyn woman.

"It was simply dreadful, my dear. The girl to whom it happened was the sweetest looking thing in a blue walking suit with a baby blue automobile veil over her face and blond hair that looked almost natural. She must have been a prospective bride out purchasing her trousseau, and, of course, she had a nice looking young man along with her. She watched them while they did half the counters in the shop, and finally I saw her plump to the deer and leave him there while she returned to buy something more. Something told me she was coming back to the house underneath counter, and she did. She picked out her purchases and they were sent up to be wrapped."

"It was one of those stores where you have to wait fifteen minutes to get a penny change out of a 5-cent piece. She waited and waited, and kept looking out to see if the young man was still where she had put him. Finally he too, got tired and turned and came back in. As she was about to leave, she saw me and him join her and together they practiced standing first on one foot and then on the other."

Giving Him Time.

(Chicago Journal.)

Her Mother—Mr. Sloman has been coming to see you for quite a long while, Maude. What are his intentions? Do you know?

Maude—Well, I think he intends to keep on coming.

Unreasonable.

(Chicago Journal.)

Mrs. Puzzle—I really don't know what to do. It is very difficult to please the world.

Mrs. Puzzle—What is the difficulty?

Mrs. Puzzle—People are so unreasonable in their comments. If you tell all you hear they say you are a gossip, and if you don't they say you are stupid and commonplace.

Helpless.

(San Antonio Express.)

H. C. Barnabee, the veteran actor, lay, disabled from a fall, and listened to the condolences of a dramatic critic.

"For years and years," the writer said, "you haven't missed a performance. Now here you lie, helpless as a corpse."

"As helpless as a corpse," said Mr. Barnabee, "or as helpless as two inhabitants of whom I heard the other day."

"These two men had dined together, and after dinner had set too long over their coffee, their liquor, their brandy, and so on. When it came time for them to go home they were in a very bad way. Helpless, in fact. They leaned on one another, going with linked arms, but each, as a reed to lean on, was as weak as the other."

"Finally they fell, and, with a loud splash, they rolled into a full gutter. A police officer appeared and grabbed their upper man by the collar."

"No," said the other man. "Never mind me. I can swim."

Led to Jail by His Dog.

(London Daily Mail.)

Old and blind, a man was sentenced to a week's imprisonment at Waterford for being drunk and disorderly, and his dog was allowed to spend the night in the lockup with him.

Next morning, the prisoner, led by his dog and escorted by the police, was taken to the jail, and at the gate the animal whined so pitifully on being parted from its master that the man was ordered to go to the public pound with his canine companion.

Once more was a procession formed, the dog leading the way, and a motley crowd bringing up the rear. At the pound the companions were parted, the dog howling dismally.

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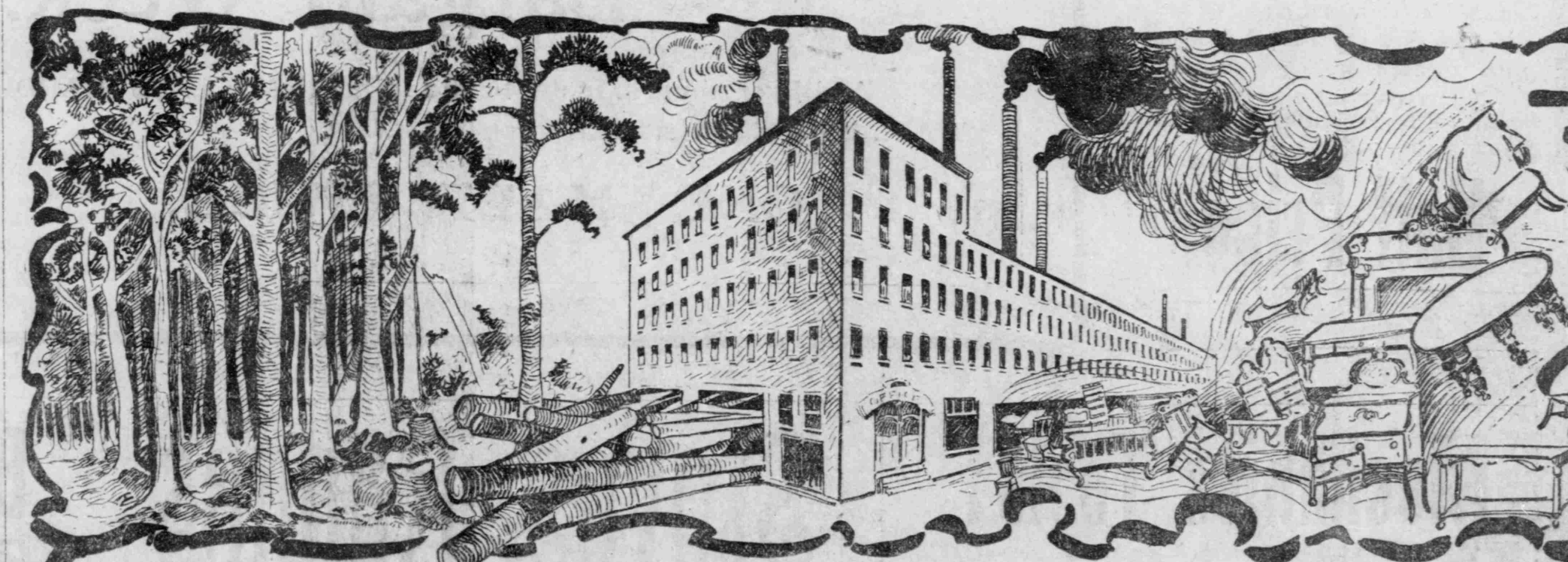
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